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Ranch Economy Can't Stand  
Unrestrained Table Activities

By Monte Noelke

MERTZON — A pack of Siberian werewolves could attack the ranch industry now, and chances are the newspapers wouldn't give the onslaught third page billing; so common has hard luck combined with ill fortune become in the livestock game, everybody takes it for granted.

Even the boys working here at the ranch haven't caught on to how hard the times are. You'd think a drover would be the first to realize that his boss was in a jam that would make a slave dealer cry, but the hands don't seem to realize that the last big agricultural boom, which occurred in the spring of 1820, has worn off.

Lack of understanding of our problems is caused in large measure by the people who visit us. It's impossible to preach table thrift, for instance, right after the men have watched a calf buyer spread enough jelly on a biscuit to cause dextrose poisoning in an auctioneer.

Lectures on cutting down on the grocery bill are meaningless if every visiting hombre attacks the vittles with the intensity of a man setting out to dehorn a bunch of big steers. Ranch hands just can't be expected to comprehend economy when their city brethren spoon sugar in their coffee as if the principal industry of the Shortgrass Country were raising sugar cane.

High living urbanites are the worst examples. In the first nine months of this year we have already used up seven pounds and six ounces (three big jars!) of table sweetening. An estimated 50 percent of the outgo was due to visitors leading everybody astray, ignoring the gravy bowl and going all-out for the jelly jar. Two or three times it got so bad that I thought for sure we were going to have to rush a doctor from town loaded with insulin to handle some emergency cases of sugar diabetes.

Needless to say, four-bit wool and 24-cent heifer calves won't support that kind of madness. I'd bet good money that Mr. and Mrs. Aristotle Onassis won't be able to feed jams and jellies free choice. So, pray tell, how can a dryland ranch operation keep a pack of cowhands and bearish livestock buyers in a style that would look out of place around an Oriental prince's place of business?

Weather forecasters all say it's going to be a long, hard winter. Feed dealers predict the price of their product will move gradually higher. The whole situation looks mighty grim.

It sure would help if these cowboys would learn to use a little restraint when they get to the dinner table.